

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, March 11, 2008

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Social workers can learn from tragic abuse case

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

Social workers in two counties failed to protect 9-year-old Nicholas Braman from an admitted child abuser -- his father. The Montcalm County boy's death last October was a senseless and preventable tragedy. Two state probes of the incident recommend additional training, performance reviews, oversight and team decision-making for child protective service workers to prevent a similar incident. Those are good measures, but using good judgment and common sense when it comes to protecting children is also vital.

Nicholas was left in his father's home despite the removal of two older brothers, who had been abused with an electric cattle prod. Oliver Braman, 46, was facing jail time for that crime when he took Nicholas' life. He also had a past history of abuse in Saginaw County. Either, and certainly both, of those incidents should have prompted the boy's removal by the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Nicholas' body was found with his father's and step mother's in what police called a murder/suicide. Oliver Braman hooked a hose from his truck's exhaust pipe and pumped carbon monoxide into his Stanton home. Both adults and Nicholas had ingested large amounts of nighttime pain relievers. Police believe the boy was forced to write a suicide note.

The incident happened about a month after the father pled guilty to using the cattle prod to discipline his two older sons. The boys, ages 14 and 15 went to live with their mother in Saginaw after the incident. But Nicholas was allowed to remain with his father because the abuse did not specifically involve him.

"Based on the information the department possessed related to past abuse, the severity of the

abuse and the guilty plea, DHS should have filed a petition with the court to more definitively secure Nicholas' safety," the human services' probe found.

It is unrealistic to believe that protective services workers will make the right call all the time in every case. State case workers investigate 70,000 abuse and neglect allegations a year. But the missteps in the Braman case are disturbing and defy reason. The DHS report reveals how social workers in Montcalm and Saginaw counties failed to follow policies and procedures that might have saved Nicholas' life.

The incident should impact how child protective services workers handle cases of abuse when there are multiple children in a home, but not all of them are being abused. Workers have to follow the procedures meant to safeguard children and should always err on the side of caution.

The state Department of Human Services has ordered performance reviews of everyone involved in the case and additional training for the staff in Montcalm County. A review of other sample cases in Montcalm County will be done to make sure critical child safety policies and law are being followed. The county's human services supervisor will be required to shadow a CPS supervisor from another county for at least two weeks.

Critical misjudgment in this case meant the difference between life and death for a 9-year-old child. Everyone should be bothered by that sad reality -- especially those entrusted with watching over some of the state's most vulnerable citizens.

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the SOURCE

Motion to drop charges against meth lab couple denied

By DEANNA ROSE
Source Staff Writer

A judge denied requests by attorneys that charges be dropped against a Sterling Heights couple accused of running a methamphetamine lab from their home that contributed to the July 2007 death of their 20-month-old son.

Macomb County Circuit Judge Diane Druzinski upheld the charges against Tina Boughner, 29, and Andrew Young, 27, in an opinion issued March 4. A final pretrial conference will take place at 8:30 a.m. on March 10, before the case goes to trial March 11.

Young's attorney, Jeffery Cojocar, said the pretrial conference is the last chance for a plea agreement to be offered and accepted before the trial starts. However, he said he did not know if anything would be offered or if either defendant would take such an offer.

Both defense attorneys had previously filed motions to have their clients' bonds reduced and their charges dropped.

Boughner's attorney, Carl MacPherson, had requested the second-degree murder and two drug charges against Boughner be dismissed. MacPherson claimed the infant's death was due to dehydration, not malnutrition, which could call for a manslaughter charge, at most. He also said the drug charges do not apply to his client, because he said no illegal items were found in the home pertaining to a methamphetamine lab.

Cojocar requested the drug charges against Young be dismissed, stating essential methamphetamine ingredients were not found in the home. In addition, Cojocar said chemicals found were the result of Young's interest in chemistry.

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Dad of autistic West Bloomfield girl nearly free of rape charges

She won't testify, so case collapses

BY JOHN WISELY and L.L. BRASIER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS • March 11, 2008

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A West Bloomfield man who spent 80 days in jail while accused of raping his autistic daughter could be reunited with her as early as today after Oakland County prosecutors suddenly sought to dismiss all charges against him.

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Bloomfield Hills District Judge Marc Barron has scheduled a 10 a.m. hearing to rule on the request to drop charges against the man and his wife.

Prosecutors in December charged the girl's father with repeatedly raping her. His wife was charged with child abuse in failing to stop him. Prosecutors also sought to terminate the couple's custody of the 15-year-old girl and a 13-year-old son who has Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism.

The Free Press is not naming the parents to protect the girl's identity.

The case has been controversial because the girl's claims were made through facilitated communication, a widely discredited method in which a teaching aide helps a nonverbal student type responses to questions into a keyboard. Experts testified that scientific studies of the method show that the aide, consciously or subconsciously, authors all of the messages.

On Monday, prosecutors sought to drop both the criminal and the custody cases, claiming in court filings that the girl had used facilitated communication to tell them that she was afraid and would not testify in court. Without her testimony, the case lacked its central accusation.

"The option of alternative proofs have been fully evaluated and found to be not legally sufficient to sustain the requisite burden of proof," Prosecutor David Gorcyca wrote in the request to drop the charges. He declined to comment further.

Defense attorneys learned of the move after prosecutors had been in court to seek the dismissal. The request caught them off guard, they said.

"Usually, you notify the defense attorneys when you're going to dismiss the case," said Deborah Tyner, who represents the girl's mother. "We had no indication."

"It was the right thing to do. It's just unfortunate it took so long," said Robyn Frankel, another attorney in the case.

They said that prosecutors were never able to establish that the girl could communicate independently.

At two court hearings in January, the girl was unable to answer a single question correctly when her teaching aide did not hear it first. The questions included, "Are you a boy or a girl?" and "What color is your sweater?"

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Dad+of+autistic+West+Bloomfield+girl+n...> 3/11/2008

"This case should never have been brought," said lawyer Jerome Sabbota, who represents the girl's father.

Oakland County Family Court Judge Joan Young ordered the children to be returned to their parents on Monday, despite prosecutors' claims that the girl still fears her father.

Contact **JOHN WISELY** at 248-351-3696 or jwisely@freepress.com.

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Charges dropped against man accused of raping autistic daughter

By John Wisely • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • March 11, 2008

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A judge agreed this morning to drop all charges against a West Bloomfield man who had been accused of raping his autistic 14-year-old daughter after prosecutors said they didn't have enough evidence to proceed.

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Bloomfield Hills District Judge Marc Barron also dropped the case against the man's wife, who had been charged with child abuse for not stopping the alleged assaults.

The ruling comes one day after Oakland County Family Court Judge Joan Young granted the prosecutor's request to dismiss a case in her court seeking to terminate the couple's custody of the girl and her 13-year-old brother.

The Free Press is not naming the couple to protect the identity of their daughter. The couple declined to comment after Barron's ruling but smiled broadly while leaving the court room and began making arrangements to have their global positioning tethers removed.

"They are relieved to have this matter over," said Deborah Tyner, who represents the girl's mother.

Tyner said the couple hoped to reunite with their children sometime today. The father spent 80 days in the Oakland County Jail without bond while the case progressed.

"What they have is a case that doesn't exist," said Jerome Sabbota, who represents the father. "Once they realized what they were dealing with, they should have dismissed it."

The dismissals marked the end of a controversial case, where the rape claim was made through facilitated communication, a widely discredited method where non-verbal students type with the assistance of a facilitator.

Experts testified in the case that scientific evaluations of the method show the facilitator, consciously or not, authors the method.

But assistant prosecutor Barbara Morrison said that the girl did communicate with investigators through the method.

"She did indicate, on more than one occasion, that she was afraid of her father," Morrison said.

Morrison said the girl told them that she would not testify and without her testimony, the case could not proceed.

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Boy's testimony about molestation challenged

BY L.L. BRASIER AND JOHN WISELY • FREE PRESS STAFF
WRITERS • MARCH 11, 2008

An 8-year-old Chicago boy provided testimony Monday that conflicts with earlier statements about what happened between him and the former Oak Park teacher accused of molesting him.

James Perry, 34, is charged with four counts of criminal sexual conduct. Perry is accused of dragging the boy, then 5, and another boy, 4, from a supervised lunch line at Key Elementary School in October 2005, and assaulting them.

The boy -- who at one point fell asleep on the witness stand -- said Monday that he was alone when Perry dragged him into an empty special education room and forced oral sex on him. His name is being withheld by the Free Press. In earlier statements, he insisted he and the 4-year-old were assaulted at the same time.

He also initially told investigators that the 4-year-old was tea-bagged by Perry, a street term referring to a form of oral sex. But Monday morning, he said he did not know what the term meant.

Defense attorney Mitchell Ribitwer questioned the child extensively about the contradictions and at one point stopped because the boy fell asleep on the witness stand. The judge prodded him to sit up.

"Does that mean some of the things you told were lies?" Ribitwer asked.

"I don't remember," the boy said, yawning.

Assistant Prosecutor Andrea Dean asked the boy if he was telling the truth when he said Perry assaulted him.

"It's the truth," he said.

The boy's mother took the stand in the afternoon, and told jurors that she became worried when she found that the boy, newly enrolled mid-semester at Key Elementary, was not in the lunchroom with the other children on his first day of school Oct. 12, 2005.

Over the next three days, she questioned him, she said, and details emerged, the boy saying a male teacher had pulled him into a lunchroom to do "gay" stuff to him.

Ribitwer asked how the child would know about "gay" things, and the mother said she did not know.

She also said she never had a conversation with her son's kindergarten teacher Lynn Duncan in the days following the allegations. Duncan told the Free Press last year that the mother said the boy had been assaulted before, while living in Chicago.

This is Perry's second trial. He was convicted of the charges in September 2005, but Judge Denise Langford Morris threw the conviction out after learning that police never interviewed the three adults assigned to the special education room where the assaults were alleged to have took place.

All three are expected to testify that the room was always occupied during the day by children and adults and that the assaults could not have happened there.

Testimony is expected to continue today.

Contact **L.L. BRASIER** at 248-858-2262 or brasier@freepress.com.



Tuesday, March 11, 2008

8-year-old testifies in teacher sex case

New jury trial begins for Oak Park educator, whose guilty verdict in sexual assault of students in 2005 was tossed.

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- Surrounded by adults, the 8-year-old boy squirmed in the witness stand Monday, visibly uncomfortable.

In a voice barely above a whisper, he told how his Oak Park teacher allegedly sexually assaulted him in a classroom three years ago.

The boy, whose name is being withheld by The Detroit News, tugged at an ear and rubbed his eyes while he testified in a new Oakland Circuit Court jury trial for James Norman Perry, initially convicted of sexually assaulting the boy three years ago.

The boy stared vacantly at the floor as he testified that Perry forced him to perform oral and anal sex.

The boy, who now lives in Chicago, was the first witness called in the trial for Perry, 34, of Ferndale.

When asked to identify his former teacher at Key Elementary School, the boy tenuously leaned forward and pointed a finger at Perry sitting a dozen feet away.

Under questioning, the boy told how Perry pulled him out of a cafeteria lunchroom by his arm and then took him to a special education classroom "threw me on a couch" and assaulted him. The boy identified photos handed to him as the classroom and hallway at the school.

Perry sat impassively during the boy's testimony. An hour earlier, before several well-wishers, reporters and the curious had filed into the courtroom, Perry, his mother and their minister gathered in a corner and quietly joined in prayer before the start of proceedings.

Perry had been convicted of second-degree criminal sexual conduct by a jury in his first trial but Oakland Circuit Judge Denise Langford Morris tossed out the verdict and ordered a new trial for Perry after defense attorneys uncovered new evidence and witnesses they believe would have influenced a jury verdict.

"In deciding what testimony to believe you should rely on your common sense and everyday experience," said Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Andrea Dean, addressing the new jury of eight men and five women on Monday.

"It will never make sense why a person would do what he is charged with doing," she said.

"I don't need to prove why he did it or his motivation only that he did it."

Defense attorney Mitchell Ribitwer told jurors Perry did not commit the alleged acts and indicated evidence they will see and hear will show that the boys told lies or were coached by adults on what to say.

"Right off the bat I'll agree with Ms. Dean and it may be the only thing we agree on," Ribitwer said. "This does not make sense. There is no reliable, credible or competent evidence.

"By the time this case is over you (jurors) will agree Mr. Perry is not guilty."

Both Ribitwer and Dean have new evidence and witnesses, among the 40 to testify. They include school employees and experts on forensic interviewing of children.

The first trial took seven days and jurors deliberated five hours before reaching a guilty verdict.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or mmartindale@detnews.com.

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911 operator convicted of mishandling boy's call gets probation

By DAVID RUNK • Associated Press Writer • March 11, 2008

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A Detroit 911 operator who authorities say didn't take seriously a boy's calls to report his mother's collapse has been sentenced to serve a year of probation.

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The mother was found dead three hours after the call that was handled by Sharon Nichols.

District Judge Paula Humphries on Tuesday also sentenced the 45-year-old to perform 15 days of community service.

A jury in January convicted Nichols of willful neglect of duty, a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year behind bars. Prosecutors didn't ask Humphries for jail time.

Nichols testified at trial she could not hear the then-5-year-old boy on the other end of the line. Authorities say Robert Turner called 911 twice on Feb. 20, 2006, to report his 46-year-old mother had passed out.

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Children in need of love: Foster system lacks enough parents

By EMILY PRAWDZIK GENOFF
Of The Oakland Press

In the midst of a statewide shortage of foster parents, Oakland County foster and adoption agencies want the public to know they are always looking for warm and caring individuals to open their homes to children in need.

"Basically, what it's about is having good moral character, sound emotional health and the desire and awareness to serve children's needs," said Nancy Rebar, director of family preservation with Oakland Family Services.

According to the agency, there were about 17,000 abused and neglected children statewide placed in foster care in 2007. As of June of last year, 1,634 Oakland County children were placed in foster care.

"Some of the myths about (foster) families is that you have to be married -- not true, a lot of single folks are foster parents" Rebar said. "Another is you have to own your own home -- you don't, you can live anywhere."

Sarah and Ray Eisenhardt of Troy became foster parents nearly three years ago. They've since welcomed six foster children, ranging in age from 2 to 6, into their home.

The Eisenhardts have adopted four of them, one of whom joined the family only last week. In addition, they also live with Ray's two biological daughters.

Sarah said there was "no real specific reason" why she and Ray decide to become foster parents.

"There are just so many kids that need foster parents and I've always been aware of that," she said. "I feel I have a lot to offer."

In any given year, only 2,600 children find foster homes out of 4,000 children in need of homes in the state.

"What usually ends up happening is (foster children) will be placed in a home but it might not be the best match for them," said Sean de Four, the Wayne County regional director with the Judson Center, a nonprofit human service agency in Royal Oak.

"Usually kids get bounced around from homes. They're like a round peg in a square hole and, because there's not a lot of options, that's really not a good thing for the kid at all."

Another reason for the shortage of foster parents is that many current foster parents are adopting their foster children and, as a result, are limited in the number of additional children they can bring into their homes.

"We celebrate every time a child is adopted, but then that becomes a foster home that is not available to take other children," de Four said.

"There's a constant cycle of foster parents leaving the pool because they're adopting kids, which is a good thing, but a challenge, too, because we constantly have to recruit new

(families)."

The biggest problem is that the system is underfunded, de Four said.

"There are high caseloads, there's not enough money to hire adequate staff and the resources are so scarce that we're not able to adequately train staff who will work with these families," he said. "The reimbursement rate to foster parents and agencies is too low."

Oakland County children awaiting foster family placement stay in Children's Village, a residential facility for children and youths.

Rebar said children staying at Children's Village are typically there for only a few days until a foster home is found.

"It's a residential facility designed to be short-term to meet their immediate needs, because children do best in a family setting," Rebar said.

Another major problem facing children in foster care is "aging out." Once a child turns 18 or graduates from high school, he or she is no longer the responsibility of the state.

Nearly 500 children age out of the system every year.

These former foster children are, statistically, more likely to face teen pregnancy, homelessness and trouble with the law than children who are set up with a family.

People interested in becoming foster parents should be at least 18 years old, financially stable and willing to undergo a background check.

"What we tell families is we're not looking for perfect parents, we're looking for folks who have the ability to love and accept a child," Rebar said.

Contact staff writer Emily Prawdzik Genoff at (248) 745-4639 or emily.genoff@oakpress.com. Clay Taylor of Capital News Service contributed to this report.

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

Rotary, Lions team up to help children in foster care

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

Times Staff

The Bay City Lions Club and Rotary Club of Bay City are teaming up on a community project to help mid-Michigan foster children.

The project, called "Love Bags," aims to collect hundreds of new and used duffle bags and suitcases that will be given to children in Michigan's foster care system.

The bags will be passed on to Lutheran Child & Family Service of Michigan, which has an office at 6019 West Side Saginaw Road.

Roger L. Pickering, the regional director for the agency and a member of the Rotary Club, said the project is much needed.

"These kids bounce around and often, they carry their belongings in garbage bags or paper bags. Some have no bags, only the clothes on their backs," said Pickering.

He said a project like Love Bags can send the message that "you are not garbage; your belongings are not garbage."

And, he said, the simple gift of a suitcase or duffle bag can provide hope.

It shows children "there are people out there who don't even know you who care about you and want you to be better off," Pickering said. "Here's something that is yours that you take with you. It's a source of stability."

Lions Club President Dennis Poirier said his club got involved in the project as a way to show community support for foster children.

"It gives kids some pride," he said. "Hopefully, it helps them make a positive step in their life and serves as something they can hold on to - that we support the youth in our community."

Love Bags are being collected now through April 30. There are six drop-off locations in Bay City:

* AAA of Michigan, 1111 S. Euclid Ave.

* American Red Cross, East Shoreline

Chapter, 228 Washington Ave.

* Chemical Bank, 213 Center Ave.

* Citizens Bank, 701 Washington Ave.

* Do-All Inc., 1400 S. Lincoln St.

* Gougeon Bros. Inc.,

100 Patterson Ave.

Pickering said large athletic bags with straps are most desired, as are backpacks for younger children. Suitcases and smaller duffle bags also come in handy for many children.

"It's a real simple concept: When kids come into care and have belongings in black garbage bags, it just turns your stomach," said Pickering.

"This is a chance to get kids out of garbage bags and into nicer bags."

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Bills would give adoptees access to health history

Posted by [Associated Press](#) March 11, 2008 08:41AM

LANSING -- Some adopted children would be able to get information about their biological family's medical history and possibly copies of their original birth certificates when they become adults under bills that soon could be voted on in the Michigan House.

The legislation is aimed at helping adoptees learn more about their health prospects, said sponsor Rep. Lisa Wojno, a Democrat from Warren. She said it could be a tool to help people learn whether they are at higher risk for cancer, hereditary diseases or other illnesses.

"Without that information, it puts their health and their children's health at risk," Wojno said.

The bill is undergoing some revisions, but could be ready for a vote this month. Changes under discussion could help ease concerns about privacy rights for biological parents.

Michigan law allows some adopted individuals to get birth certificates once they become adults. But for those adopted between May 1945 and September 1980, a copy of the original birth certificate showing the names of biological parents is available only with a court order.

The House bill as originally written would allow adoptees 21 and older to apply for a copy of their original birth certificate regardless of when they were adopted. Birth parents of adopted individuals could file a form with the state indicating whether they want to be contacted by the children they gave up for adoption.

Birth parents also would have the option to file an updated medical history form with the state, which would be available to the adoptee regardless of whether the parent wants to be contacted.

Another option under consideration would allow adoptees to obtain a health history without getting a copy of the original birth certificate. That provision

is aimed at alleviating concerns the bill would violate confidentiality promises made to birth parents years ago.

There are more than 2,500 adoption placements in Michigan each year.



Troubled children's art in spotlight

COVE benefit auction

Kevin Braciszkeski - Daily News Staff Writer

Monday, March 10, 2008

Artworks by area children were auctioned Saturday night by Communities Overcoming Violent Encounters (COVE) and the event not only raised money for the women's shelter, it also put a spotlight on the feelings children have toward homelessness and violence.

One drawing showed a broken heart mended with tape but with a knife still embedded from the top.

Another showed a dresser topped by a dark, murky mirror featuring a barely visible blond head.

"I want a home," was the writing on one.

"Why me?" asked another drawing covered with question marks.

Another drawing showed disjointed body parts.

"Students from Journey (alternative high school) and the shelter used this as a way to express their feelings about being homeless or about violence, and how violence has affected them," Bea Rosalez, legal advocate at COVE, said about the exhibit and silent auction held at People's Church from 6 to 8 Saturday night.

Proceeds from the auction will help with COVE's expenses, but Rosalez the event also served another purpose.

"To them, I think, it's their hope to educate the community a little bit about their feelings," she said.

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Rosalez said her organization hopes to sponsor a similar event in the summer and do two each year.
Date published: 3-10-2008

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

U-M social worker gets 2-year term for sex abuse

Higgins pleaded guilty to misconduct with patients

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

BY ART AISNER

The Ann Arbor News

Thomas Higgins doesn't fit the typical profile of a criminal, much less a sexual predator.

His advantaged upbringing, advanced academic degrees, strong family support and established career with the University of Michigan Health System all point to an exemplary life, Washtenaw County Circuit Judge Melinda Morris said Monday.

But, Morris said, they also set the stage for a horrific betrayal of trust - one that has led to a prison term of at least two years for the 68-year-old former social worker.

"All these qualities that you had to show you as an upstanding individual also gave you the ammunition and the tools to commit your crimes," Morris said, while sentencing Higgins to two to 10 years in prison. "If this isn't predatory conduct, then there is no such thing."

Higgins, a social worker with the UMHS traumatic brain injury program, pleaded guilty in January to 11 counts of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a mental health professional and one count of assault with intent to commit sexual penetration.

His victims, three women ages 29 to 48, were all brain injury patients who disclosed past sexual abuse during therapy sessions. Investigators said Higgins used that information, under the guise of being a sexual therapist, to exploit the women for his own sexual gratification.

When he pleaded guilty, Higgins admitted to fondling the women's breasts and buttocks. But investigators from several police agencies said the abuse was far more severe, ranging from oral sex to intercourse in his office and the victims' homes.

Each of the women described the mental anguish they suffered and the difficulty they had in coming forward during victim's impact statements Monday.

"I used to have a very hopeful and positive outlook about my future and the world in general," said one victim who sought treatment after a car crash. "Now, because of the abuse. ... I battle depression and feelings of hopelessness constantly. I do not think I'll ever be able to completely trust any counselor."

Another woman said she's just beginning to understand the long-term affects of the abuse.

"His dredging up of memories of my prior rape caused me to become so severely depressed that I attempted suicide," she said. "The progress I had started making in dealing with my disabilities ... has now been lost. I am emotionally and financially devastated."

Despite the troubling accounts, Morris said, she would abide by the sentencing agreement reached after months of negotiations between prosecutors and attorneys representing both Higgins and his three victims.

Higgins sat with his attorney and looked straight ahead while the women read their statements just a few feet away.

"I'm truly sorry for what I've done, and I'm ready to accept my punishment," he told Morris in his only remarks.

Higgins appeared in court with about a dozen family members, close friends and members of his church.

The state has suspended Higgins' social work license while an investigation is under way, attorneys said. A civil suit filed by the women against Higgins and the UMHS is pending.

Art Aisner can be reached at aaisner@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6823.

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STURGIS JOURNAL

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Benefit set for Salvation Army, Open Door Gallery

[Print Page](#)

By Rosalie Currier
Sturgis Journal

You've heard of the starving artist. You've heard of The Salvation Army.

Bowls for Hunger supports them both. It's a way to promote the arts and fund the local food bank all by having dinner downtown on Friday night.

Bowls for Hunger is from 4-8 p.m. Friday at Open Door Gallery in downtown Sturgis.

All proceeds will be divided between The Salvation Army and the Gallery.

Participants who bring a canned good, further support The Salvation Army food pantry.

Cost is \$15 for a handcrafted bowl full of soup donated by one of the local restaurants including Trios Deli Fantail Brewing Co., Corner Cafe, Boundary Waters, Mike's Pizza and El Ranchito. Bread and a beverage are also on the menu.

For a family that could be rather costly, so soup in a disposable bowl is \$5, Sarah Kalasky, Gallery director said.

All bowls were created by Open Door artists Mark Goertzen of Constantine and Deborah Bushouse of Coldwater.

Directly related to pottery, one of the Gallery's goal in this fund raising effort is to start a clay studio in their available space, Kalasky said.



Open Door's Mark Goertzen, a potter from Constantine, has spent many donated hours creating one-of-a-kind dishes for Bowls for Hunger.

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Free tax service available for eligible households

Gladwin County Record

Last updated: Monday, March 10th, 2008 03:38:33 PM

GLADWIN COUNTY -- Many low and moderate income households are eligible for free income tax preparation as well as the Earned Income Tax Credit which may increase their refund by as much as \$4,500.

The services are provided by IRS certified Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) providers.

The VITA program is an IRS program aimed at providing free tax assistance to low to moderate income families.

Partnering agencies such as Mid Michigan Community Action, Department of Human Services, Commission on Aging and others will host the VITA site.

The service includes state and federal income taxes, as well as many state and federal tax credits. For example, the Earned Income Tax Credit credited more than 680,000 Michigan families with more than \$1.29 billion in tax year 2006. The problem is that many families do not know that they are eligible, so they never file.

The free tax preparation service will make sure that families file for all of the credits they are eligible to receive. Individuals making up to \$20,000 and families making up to \$37,000 are eligible for the service.

Interested individuals, families and seniors should contact Gladwin County's Department of Human Services office at 989-426-3300 for tax preparation sites within their county.

Mid Michigan Community Action Agency is a non-profit, human services agency serving Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Mecosta, Midland and Osceola Counties since 1966.

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City's residency rule could cost millions for charities

Groups say cash helps thousands, pays bills

BY SUZETTE HACKNEY, CECIL ANGEL and ZACHARY GORCHOW • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS • March 11, 2008

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More than 100 area nonprofit organizations that serve Detroit residents have been ruled ineligible for an important source of federal funding because the majority of their board members do not live in the city.

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The funding issue stems from a resolution passed last July by Detroit City Council requiring nonprofits that receive federal Community Development Block Grant allocations through the city to have board memberships that are made up of at least 51% city residents. A total of 105 were affected.

"All of the people we service are basically Detroiters," said a frustrated Chad Audi, president of Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries, an organization that provides daily services to about 1,200 men, women and children. "We're making a positive impact only in the city of Detroit."

CDBG funds for fiscal year 2008-09, which begins July 1, will be the first impacted by this policy, which city officials say was created to ensure that city residents are directly involved in nonprofit decisions about how to spend federal funds allocated to Detroit.

The city appropriates \$40 million in grants to various nonprofits.

Council President Ken Cockrel Jr. said he supports the residency requirement, but the council probably should have given organizations a full year to comply with it.

"In retrospect, frankly, that's an area where we dropped the ball," he said.

Changing the requirement now, he said, is problematic because HUD disapproves of changing rules in the middle of the application process.

"There's not an easy, immediate answer to funding some of these organizations," he said.

Councilwoman Barbara-Rose Collins said she sees no reason to defend the council's decision, and called the notion that outsiders can better dictate how money is used within the city paternalistic and a "slave-master mentality."

"Block grant money was given to the community to benefit the community," Collins said. "I don't think community block grants were created to provide jobs and salaries for people who live in the suburbs. They were created to benefit people who live in Detroit."

The nonprofits say the money is used for a variety of purposes, including funding after-school programs for students who are at risk of dropping out, helping pay the nonprofits' utility bills, paying staff salaries and youth job programs.

Most of the nonprofits receive less than \$100,000, such as the Detroit Area Council Boy Scouts at \$75,000 and the Detroit Urban League,

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=City%27s+residency+rule+could+cost+mil...> 3/11/2008

Goodwill Industries and Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision at \$45,000 each.

Others receive larger amounts, such as Focus: HOPE, which gets \$205,000, and Greening of Detroit at \$125,000. One of the largest amounts goes to the Senior Citizens Repair Program, which receives \$3 million.

"The dollars service people who are in the city," said Cheryl P. Johnson, chief executive officer of the Coalition On Temporary Shelter (COTS), an organization that provides shelter, meals and other services to 2,000 to 3,000 people annually. "We're looking at the most vulnerable people in our community. We can't afford to lose a dollar."

COTS received \$138,540 last year from Detroit's CDBG funds as part of the nonprofit's \$7-million budget. The money was used to pay staff salaries and utility bills.

Councilwoman Sheila Cockrel called the denial of funds to so many good organizations "an outrage." Cockrel said it's her recollection she voted against the resolution, but is not positive. Other council members did not return phone calls.

"The hallmark for the use of these funds should be in my opinion the relationship that the entity has to development," she said.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which oversees the CDBG program, requires that only organizations classified as community development organizations -- those that mostly produce the real bricks and mortar in development -- are subject to the residency rule. Yet it appears that the council took the rule a step farther by demanding residency from the majority of its nonprofit board members, said HUD spokesman Brian Sullivan.

"This suggests to me that this seems to be a local interest and a local requirement," he said.

Nonprofits ruled ineligible for CDBG funds this year because of the residency requirement will get a chance to plead their case to the council, which will hold an appeals hearing from 1 to 4 p.m. March 19 in the auditorium on the 13th floor of the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center.

Debbie Wills, a HUD public affairs officer in Chicago, said it's typical to allow for public comment before any funding status requirements are changed.

"HUD does like to have the nonprofits reflect the community, but we realize the community varies," she said.

N. Charles Anderson, president and CEO of the Detroit Urban League, said the league was granted \$45,000 this year to run educational programs within Detroit high schools to help youth who are at risk of dropping out. Urban League staff travel to schools to mentor, tutor and discuss with students career choices and any deficits in their education. The total budget is \$6.2 million.

"We try to diversify our board -- we worked hard at doing that," Anderson said. "I have a lot of African Americans on my board, but they don't all live in the city of Detroit."

Collins countered that board members and executives should make the necessary adjustments to ensure their nonprofit qualifies for grants.

"I think that if they lived in the city they would be more proactive toward the city," she said.

Contact **SUZETTE HACKNEY** at 313-222-6614 or shackney@freepress.com.

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10:08 am, March 11, 2008

Gleaners, other nonprofits face funding cuts tied to residency

By [Sherri Begin](#)

Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan plans to appeal a **Detroit City Council** decision denying it federal Community Development Block Grant funds because less than 51 percent of its board of directors are Detroit residents.

Gleaners received notification in an e-mail Monday and was among more than 100 nonprofits deemed ineligible. It informed the nonprofit that it would not be eligible for the federal funds for the 2008-09 year for not meeting the residency requirement.

Like Gleaners, many of them provide safety net services. Last year, Gleaners received more than \$48,000 from the block grant funds.

The requirement has been a longstanding condition of eligibility for the funding, said Gleaners President Agostinho Fernandes Jr. But the city has never enforced it in the past.

Detroit City Council President Ken Cockrel Jr. was not immediately available for comment after business hours Monday. Nor was a city planning commission contact listed on an announcement of an appeal hearing scheduled for March 18 at the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center.

"We need to appeal," said Fernandes said. "It's about feeding hungry folks."

Gleaners has received a portion of the funds for years, he said. "Now they are saying you are ineligible because 50 percent of your board does not reside in the city of Detroit."

"That's pretty difficult for an organization that serves six counties all together."

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Muskegon Chronicle

Woman charged with assaulting her caseworker

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

MUSKEGON HEIGHTS -- A 21-year-old Muskegon Heights woman has been charged with a felony for allegedly assaulting her Department of Human Services caseworker last week.

Laquita Emily Armstrong, of 3116 Ninth, was arraigned Thursday in 60th District Court on a charge of assaulting a DHS employee causing injury. The offense is a two-year felony. She also faces a misdemeanor trespassing charge.

The incident occurred Wednesday at the DHS offices, 2700 Baker, according to the court file.

Muskegon Heights police reported that Armstrong's child was being taken from her and that she tried to grab the child. She and the female caseworker then fell to the floor, police said.

Armstrong then got up, grabbed a bottle of water, opened it and threw it on the caseworker, according to police.

Visiting Judge Robert Benson set bail at \$15,000 cash or surety and preliminary examination for 11 a.m. March 20. If bond is posted, Armstrong is to have no contact with the caseworker, the DHS office or any DHS workers.

Armstrong in addition faces a habitual offender count. Her court file shows a conviction last year for carrying a concealed weapon.

Jane Johnson, local DHS director, said this morning that the caseworker is "doing well." Johnson said she was unable to comment on specifics of the case.

"We work with families in crisis, and sometimes things happen when we are trying to protect children," Johnson said.

"This goes to show how committed we are to the safety of children."

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